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## Championships

Over long-distance courses, what does a world's championship mean?

Over long-distance courses, Jean Bouin, the Frenchman, was an exceptional runner; so was Longboat, so is Hans Kohlehtainen. There were exceptional Marathon men to be found among the ancient Greeks, there are exceptionally good runners among modern Europeans, and among Americans; but this only from our own curiously small standpoint.

The great unique runners, the runners truly to marvel at, live in Mexico, though they are not Mexicans and most of them do not understand Spanish; neither are they unusually strong, though they are strong men enough; they are not well-developed, according to our Greek-influenced ideals of bodily beauty,—in fact, their legs often look half-starved and rather mummified about the calves. Nor are they heard of much; they keep together. The corrupt name they go by is, "Tarahumares."

"A Tarahumare will easily run 170 miles without stopping," says Lumholtz, speaking of what he has himself seen.

Now Lumholtz is a trustworthy observer, an exasperatingly trustworthy one at times, for his mania for accuracy of detail often obstructs his pages; his general air is that of a man minutely arraying and re-arraying his facts, afraid of the slightest over-statement.

He says again, on page 281 of his book, "Unknown Mexico"; "No doubt the Tarahumares are the greatest runners in the world, not in regard to speed, but endurance. . . . A man has been known to carry a letter from Guazapares to Chihuahua and back, a distance of nearly six hundred miles by the road," in five days. He speaks of having been present at a race that started at noontime and lasted, continuously and without relays, till sunrise of the following day, adding that it was a usual sight.

In some districts of Mexico a messenger will run an errand for you forty or fifty miles and cause no comment, the thing is so commonplace; these are individuals, however, belonging to tribes long ago dispersed and nameless, and the feat is only some eighty per cent better than a Marathon race as we know it. But the Tarahumares are scarcely ever heard of outside of Mexico, and very little known

even there; they keep together. Yet a distance of fifty miles to them is hardly formidable enough to require training. The training they do is ridiculous, from our standpoint; that is, ridiculously light, even when a real race is in view: though they are heavy drinkers, sometimes toppling over, dead to the world, as the saying is, and though they are inordinately fond of foot-racing, "which goes on all the year round, even when the people are weakened from scarcity of food," the training they do consists mainly, according to Lumholtz, "in abstinence from *tesvino* [native wine] for two or five days before the event." Sublime constitutions!

To quote again, (page 282); "At one race-course near Carichic, the circuit is about 14 miles long, and twelve circuits may be run here without stopping. . . ."

It is evident that the men crossing the line over the Marathon route, as we know it, have never more than a mile or so left in them.

Considering these facts, what does a world's championship over the long distance courses mean?

Joseph Conrad, in a rare and mysterious passage in one of his stories, alludes to a tribe of Indians in Mexico, members of which can outrun a deer. There is only one people in the world capable of this—the Seris. This peculiar, un-Indian-like, bitterly-hated tribe of Indians, less than four hundred in number, inhabit a dry, naked island between the coasts of Baja California and Sonora; Tiburon Island. Conrad must have had them in mind. Like the Tarahumares, what is known of them is very little, and, unlike them, their characteristic is not endurance in running, but speed.

Speaking of a Seri, Mr. W. J. McGee, of the Smithsonian, in his "Seventeenth Annual Report to the Bureau of American Ethnology," says: "One hot afternoon he begged relief from his tasks, saying the spirit of catching a deer was upon him, and he was excused . . . . Two hours later he was seen driving in a full-grown buck; on approaching the rancho the terrified animal turned this way and that, describing long arcs in its wild efforts to avoid the human habitation; yet the hunter kept beyond it, leading it off at every turn and gradually working it nearer, until, at a sudden turn, he was able to rush on it, whereupon he caught it, threw it over his shoulders, and ran into the rancho with the animal still struggling and kicking of its overheated hoofs."

In this voluminous, fascinating, matter-of-fact report, Mr. McGee mentions instances of their speed which certainly would be incredible, were they not so well authenticated; among others, that of

a man who quartered a horse, shouldered a quarter, and, thus overburdened, was too swift for the mounted vaqueros (cowboys) who pursued him, and that of another Seri (this from witnesses, however), who, while standing, was passed by a horse running full speed; he caught up to and jumped on the horse's back within less than two hundred yards, though, as the man was standing still at the moment of the horse's passing, he must have given it a considerable handicap. (He had begged if he might have the horse for food, and was granted it on condition that he overtake it within the distance I have just named.) But, indeed, it is common knowledge among the cowboys of western Sonora that, no matter how well mounted, it is useless to chase a Seri. Boys uniformly outrun their own dogs and are sometimes quick enough, says Mr. McGee, to dart at a bird and catch it before it gets out of reach. He does not say what kind of bird, or birds.

[So little is heard of the Seris, notwithstanding their marvellous fleetness, that, save Mr. McGee, I do not believe anybody has ever made a study of them. According to our notions of civilization, they are not civilized; according to rumor, God is not in them, nor a sense of refinement, and they live like beasts; according to Mr. Frederic Holder, they ought to be shot—he pretty near says this; his article, certainly, is too spitefully prejudiced and unscientific in spirit to be taken patiently; on suspicion he complains that they are cannibals—the source of his dislike, I think—and also that they are abominable snarlers (to strangers), an astounding accusation of incivility when one considers that this little group of men, never over two thousand and now less than four hundred in number, have for more than three centuries, successfully repelled Spanish, Mexican and American invasion. He might have said they are patriotic cannibals.]

Of their carriage, Mr. McGee says, “. . . a movement far lighter than that of the professional sprinter or of the thoroughbred ‘collected’ by the skilful equestrian, recalling that of the antelope skimming the plain in recurrent impulses of unseen hoof-touches . . .” Any one who has seen a month's old mule trotting will appreciate this. And again, “. . . for it is the habit of the errant Seri to roam spryly and swiftly on soundless tiptoes, to come and go like fleeting shadows of passing cloudlets, and on detection to slip behind shrub or rock and into the distance so lightly as to make no audible or visible trail, yet so fleetly withal as to evade the hard-riding horseman.” How is it, then, that they are not well developed, following our ideals in this matter? They are not models of classical perfection. Their feet are too big, their toes too big, at an inward angle to their instep, and their legs are too thin for their feet and chest. The

case is cited of a matron who, with a big jugful of water under one arm, raced forty miles to visit a sick friend, catching a hare on the way which she presented as a gift. Surely her foot was not exquisite; it was not according to tradition, for hers is a barefoot race, yet the pair must have had ample opportunity to develop. Perhaps our own are under-developed and our eyes wrong. Certainly our two toes are at no angle at all to our instep, or at an outward angle, which is horrifying to a savage.

To hit what these facts are aiming at: What does a world's championship mean? What does an Olympiad prove? Manifestly the Tarahumares and Seris are not to be judged by our standards and Hans Kohlemainen and Howard Drew, much as we all admire them, have never set a world's record; the truth is, there never was one.

*Enrique Cross.*



## Fight-Nights

(At the Armory A. A.—February 13th)

No one need be lonesome at a fight-club. There is an abundance of fellowship to be borrowed from. There is always someone beside or behind or in front of you with whom you can agree or differ or swap opinions and remarks.

The hollow arching stomach of the house rumbles behind closed doors. One of the naked lads in the ring digs in, swings up a great shovel full of fighting fuel, the door clangs open, the fighting is dashed into the maw of the crowd, a blistering glare of heat gushes out of the open furnace, the roar of it beats through the walls. More fighting, more fellowship. You burn red, everyone burns red. It is fine to be a live coal.

Later: a boy in the ring gets one too many, his knees wobble, the referee steps in. The house subsides into a quiet glow and warms the beaten chap as he feels his way out of the ring. No, you do not have to borrow fellowship. You cannot get away from it.